

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, my name is Dan Teigen, I live in Teigen, MT where my family has ranched since 1884. I'm also here as Ag Task Force Chair for the Northern Plains Resource Council, urging your support of HB592.

In the Summer of 2004, USDA held "listening sessions" in Billings & around the country to learn what folks thought about their National Animal ID proposals. Apparently, USDA either wasn't *listening* or, if they were, they didn't *hear* what folks told them.

A mandatory National Animal ID program, as they've been proposing, would be costly, complicated & redundant in all the wrong places. NAIS would impose a downward shift of cost and liability onto family farmers & ranchers.

For well over a century, Montana producers have worked out ways to take care of themselves & their livestock. If this wasn't the case, we wouldn't have made it so far, from the days of open range before barbed wire to the days of cross fencing & rotational grazing. One thing we've always been able to count on is our hot iron brands. In fact, I've collected all the hot iron brands that have fallen off or been rubbed off of our cattle over the years – I brought them with me today in my right front shirt pocket... you'll notice, I don't have a right shirt pocket.

What we use in MT works for ranchers in MT – branding, back tagging, bangs tattoos & tags, travel permits & brand inspections, etc. Let Iowa hog farmers, Georgia poultry growers & Vermont dairy farmers use what works best for them. If USDA wants to impose a hot iron brand on Georgia chickens or ear tags on turkeys - that would be fun to watch, but an entirely unproductive use of our tax dollars. Let farmers & ranchers, feedlots & packers & processors, all figure out what works best for them to accomplish the bottom line goal – keeping track of what they produce.

It has also not gone unnoticed how USDA priorities seem to be heavily tilted in favor of ear tag & chip companies. In what seems to be another case of cognitive dyslexia, USDA & big Agribusiness seem to be putting the tag before the cow, like the cart before the horse. There is a well aimed, double barrel of mistrust equally toward either "big government" controlling & manipulating our vital information to our detriment, or toward "big business" controlling & manipulating our vital information to our detriment. Which of these two scenarios is worse, I don't know. But, let's not find out. I have a lot more faith in the competence & priorities of our own state agencies than I do USDA. Besides, USDA has bigger fish to fry than hounding 4H kids about their show lambs or telling cattle ranchers what they're doing wrong. They should start by getting back to *preventing* disease outbreaks in the first place, rather than waiting for outbreaks to happen and then trying to manage the damage. With that, I ask for your support of HB592. Thank you for your consideration.

Brucellosis is a slow moving disease so I am not very sympathetic with the argument that the vet authorities need to trace down all of herd mates in 24 hours. The old way may be slow and time consuming but it works.

For other diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) that may not be the case. Interestingly enough, FMD is not on the list of disease that USDA plans to address with the animal ID system. Perhaps this is because an outbreak of FMD will be a true emergency and the immediate response will be a total ban on livestock movements. It doesn't matter where they came from it only matters whether they are currently infected and that they do not go somewhere else to infect other animals.

My hunch is that one of the pushes from the veterinary side for NAIS is that it seems like a good idea - the technology exists so we should be using the technology. This is not a good enough reason why all animal owners in the United States must buy \$3.00 radio chips for all of their animals, buy a wand reader, buy a computer, buy the appropriate software, buy an internet connection (the data store is internet based) and register his farm or ranch with the US government with another damn number that he can't remember.

If NAIS is a good idea and will help eradicate and control animal diseases I am willing to be convinced, but so far I have not read or heard anything that honestly explains how NAIS will benefit me. I am also willing to accept the notion that NAIS might be the right technology for other segments of the industry. Maybe this is exactly what is needed to control TB and Johne's Disease in dairy cattle. We should let the Dairy people tell us if this is the case.

However, for range cattle in Montana I see this program as just a pain in the neck and an unnecessary expense. That is why I was happy to learn that the Montana Legislature is considering a bill that will instruct the Dept of Livestock from getting involved with any Mandatory NAIS programs.

We have the time to think this through and since we have not had straight answers from USDA there is no reason why we should buy in until we do.

Gilles Jackson
Grass Range, MT

An Open Letter to the Montana Legislature.

Step by step we are being boxed in as the Dept of Agriculture (USDA) creates rules for their National Animal Identification System (NAIS). It looks like in the coming year we will be required to register our ranch and animals when we vaccinate our heifers for Brucellosis. The proposed rule states that if we do not voluntarily register our ranch, than our veterinarian will do it for us.

I first heard of NAIS when one of Congressman Rehberg's staff members told a room full of ranchers that Animal ID was a train that was a coming and that we had better get used to it. Since that meeting, NAIS has met a fire storm of objections and USDA keeps changing its tune as to why we should love it.

At first we told that Animal IDs were needed to comply to the Country of Origin Law (COOL). That was not true.

At one time, all animals were to be included in one huge data base maintained and controlled by a prominent national beef organization. This included dogs, cats, canaries, and backyard chickens. The back yard chickens are still on the list but how we are supposed to keep a radio chip tags in their ears has not been explained. We are also still not sure who will administrate the data base.

Then we were told that this was needed to market our calves. I noticed that last fall the buyer of my calves put his own radio chip ear tags in the calves before loading. If he wants to waste his time and money – well that is his business.

Now USDA has declared that NAIS is actually designed to prevent and control disease outbreaks. At least this is a real reason and one that we should carefully evaluate before accepting or rejecting animal ID.

Although USDA has told us that NAIS will help them respond to disease outbreaks they have not explained why this program will be better than what veterinarians have worked with in the past. Recent incidences of Brucellosis in Montana have been efficiently dealt with and we need to commend our State Veterinarian for a job well done.

Would radio chipped cows made the vet's job easier – maybe? It might have made it harder if the computerized information was all balled up and tangled. Technology when it works is marvelous. When it doesn't work you may have to spend hours on the phone with some guy named Raji in India.

One thing one can say for hot iron brands and tattoos is that they are visible and simple. They don't require a \$1000 wand to read and another \$1000 computer to interpret the information. And we don't need to wake up Raji in the middle of his night to find out why we can't get the data from the wand to the computer.

Gilles - NAIS
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Gilles Stockton

Grass Range

Members of the Committee-

My name is Mike Scott and I reside at 4907 Jellison Road in Billings, Montana. I can be contacted at 406-839-3333 or mscott151@gmail.com. I operate Blue Creek Boers, a meat goat ranch just south of Billings. I am writing to ask you all to support the legislation before you that would insure that we, Montana's livestock producers, are not forced or coerced to enroll in the National Animal Identification System.

As I am sure you are aware, there is nothing in the proposed legislation that would prevent anyone from enrolling in this program if it makes sense for them. However, for me, this program does not make sense. The profit margins on livestock are slim, and the costs of purchasing a scanner and the compliant tags would eat into our profits enough to make us reconsider our work. I run a small herd of goats and ranching is not my primary job because of these low margins. The NAIS would only continue to eat away at our hard earned money. We do not move a high volume of livestock and instead try to focus on careful breeding for desired carcass characteristics. The NAIS program gives a competitive advantage to vertically integrated industrial livestock companies. Under NAIS rules, they are allowed to use a group ID number instead of tagging each animal. They would not bear the full cost of the program and therefore can sell their products at a lower price than we independent producers could. This is not how a market is supposed to function, and instead is yet another example of the USDA and corporate ag working together to squeeze independent producers out of the market place. We want to compete on an even playing field. We produce a superior product, yet it seems that the designers of the NAIS want to make our product cost prohibitive to the consumer.

I am 29 years old. I have followed a family tradition in getting involved with agriculture again. Though there is wide concern that young people are not getting involved with agriculture, programs like this discourage our involvement. As anyone who has worked a farm or ranch knows, the up front capital investment to begin ranching is huge. This program only adds to that burden. While some may choose to be involved in order to get a source verification premium, there is no premium for anyone if the program becomes mandatory to everyone. Therefore, we bear the costs of implementing the program and get nothing in return except increased cost.

Committee members, please tell Washington to quit telling us how to ranch by passing this piece of legislation before you. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns. I thank you, Rep. Getz and Randall, the Montana Cattleman and Northern Plains Resource Council for your action on this important problem.